



## **PARENTS GUIDE TO GANGS**

Parents can protect their children from gang activity through taking positive actions, such as monitoring their children's activities, fostering close relationships with them, and using positive discipline strategies. However, parents often lack factual information about gangs.

The following information is designed to provide parents with information in order to recognize and prevent gang involvement.

### **Behaviors Associated with Joining a Gang**

The early adolescent years (12-14 years of age) are a crucial time when youths are exposed to gangs and may consider joining a gang. Youths who become involved in gangs will often attempt to hide it from their parents. Graffiti (drawing gang names and symbols) is the most common sign of gang activity. You should check your child's room, furniture, school books, papers and notebooks for gang names, logos, and nicknames. Check their clothing, inside waistbands, necklines, cuffs, and sleeves. Check inside shoes: shoe tongue, sole and sides. If your child has gang information written in these places, then they are associating with gangs. Look for and deal with these warning signs:

- Unusual interest in one or two particular colors of clothing or a particular logo. Selecting or wearing the same color & style of clothes every day.
- Interest in gang-influenced music, videos and movies.
- Use and practice of hand signals and body gestures to communicate with friends.
- Peculiar drawings or gang symbols on schoolbooks, clothing, notebooks, or even walls.
- Skipping school or missing work often. Declining performance, or behavior.
- Suspected drug use, such as alcohol, inhalants, and narcotics.
- Withdrawal from family and normal family activities.
- Staying out late at night; secretive activities, unusual desire for secrecy.



- Confrontational behavior, such as talking back, verbal abuse, name calling, and disrespect for parental authority.
- Sudden negative opinions about law enforcement or adults in positions of authority (school officials or teachers).
- Change in attitude about school, church, or other normal activities or change in behavior at these activities.
- Drastic changes in hair or dress style and/or having a group of friends who have the same hair or dress style.
- Withdrawal from longtime friends and forming bonds with an entirely new group of friends. Spending time with new friends you don't approve of.
- Unexplained body markings, injuries or tattoos.
- Unexplained cash or goods, such as clothing or jewelry, or possession of weapons.

### **Common Gang Identifiers**

Gang-style clothing and dress: Gang members may use a particular style of dress to identify with a particular gang, set, clique, or crew. This might include clothing or bandanas worn only in certain colors that are representative of a gang. Other clothing that might be worn by gang members could include pants worn well below the waist (sagging); gang-themed T-shirts with pictures of gang members, prison scenes, graffiti, or slogans; two- or three-toned bead necklaces; sports clothing of specific teams; or colored fabric belts, occasionally with a metal buckle that includes the initial(s) of the gang.

Colors: Many gangs use one or more colors as a symbol to represent their gang. These colors may be worn on shirts, bandanas, multicolored or single-colored beads, belts, hats, shoelaces, headbands, jewelry and other items.

Symbols and numbers: Some symbols and numbers may have special significance within the gang culture in a particular area. A few common symbols from some of the large gangs in the United States are stars, crowns, pitchforks, three dots in a triangle, and numbers. You can contact Detective C.A. Gardner at (864) 282-2949 for specific information on the meaning of unidentifiable symbols or numbers that you may see in graffiti or clothing in the City of Greenville.



**Sports items:** Letters, colors, or symbols may have specific gang meaning in local-gang culture, such as Kansas City Royals (KC = Kill Crips). Sports items may be purchased in a nontraditional color to correspond with the gang's colors or may be altered with graffiti or extra symbols or writing.

**Graffiti:** Gangs use graffiti to mark their territory, brag about their reputation, mourn fallen members, and threaten or challenge rival gangs. For this reason, graffiti can be very dangerous and should be removed as soon as possible. Youths who are participating in graffiti may have items such as spray paints, spray-paint plastic tips, wide tipped markers, or sketchbooks with graffiti works in progress and may have paint on their clothing, backpacks, or other items.

**Tattoos:** Tattoos are used to show an individual's loyalty to his/her gang. These tattoos often include the name, initials, or symbols of the specific gang and may be found on the hands, neck, face, chest, back, or arms.

**Hand signs:** Some gangs use specific hand gestures to communicate their affiliation with the gang and issue threats or challenges to rival gangs.

**Gang-influenced music and movies:** Gansta/gangster rap is a style of rap music characterized by violent, tough-talking lyrics that glorify street-gang culture. Many popular movies also focus on street gangs and their activities. Youths may show fascination with music and movies that portray street-gang culture.

### **Why do Children Join Gangs?**

**Identity, Attention, and Status:** Gangs offer a powerful group identity and a recognition they cannot get at home or elsewhere.

**Protection:** Joining a gang may offer protection from rival gangs.

**Feeling of belonging:** Gang activity offers a feeling of being part of a "family" which may be missing from the child's home. The child becomes loyal to the gang's values, rather than those of the home. They may lack parental attention and support.

**Intimidation:** Threats and violent beatings may be used to force youths to join.



Excitement: Gang activity may seem attractive to kids who are bored, lack interests, and direction, or do not feel good about themselves. The media has glamorized gangs in music, movies and video games - this adds to the excitement.

Peer Pressure: Children are pressured to join gangs if others around them are gang members.

### **How Economics Relates to the Rise in Gang Activity**

Due to stricter drug laws ("three strikes you're out"), gangs have begun to recruit youth to perform illegal activities. Juveniles receive lighter sentences than adults.

Gangs recruit new members by creating myths that are attractive to young recruits. These myths become the foundation for young aspirations. Today, the movie, music, video, and video game industry perpetuate these myths.

Gangs lure youth with promises of money, jewelry (bling-bling), sex, and glamour. Parties are used to seduce them into the gang. At the parties, they have fun, get high, and believe the rhetoric they are bombarded with. Most gangs members are high school dropouts.

It's attractive to youth who live among poverty, unemployment, and low paying jobs. Youth see joining a gang as the easiest and only available way to make money. Gang activity has risen as the number of decent jobs has declined in their neighborhood.

Youth also join gangs because gang membership can enhance prestige or status among friends or the opposite sex. Youth see personal advantages to gang membership.

### **What Parents Can Do**

Try to talk calmly with your child no matter how upset the possibility of gang membership makes you. Ask your child if they are in a gang, and why. Avoid being quick to judge. Recognize that gang membership is not just the child's problem, it's the family's problem as well.

Talk to your children about gangs and way to avoid them.

Let them know that you disapprove of gangs and do not want to see them hurt or arrested.



Redefine the rules your child must follow and enforce them.

Seek outside help if your child won't talk, is difficult to communicate with, or if you suspect your child is lying.

Supervise your child's activities, know their friends and their friend's parents. Make sure you know how your child is spending their free time.

Get your child involved in supervised, positive group activities that interest them and help them develop a sense of belonging.

Develop open and frequent communication with your child so that they will come to you if they have a problem. Make no topic off limits.

Spend positive time with your child. Plan activities the whole family can enjoy, but also spend time alone with your child.

Get involved in your child's education. Put a high value on education and help them to do their best in school. Keep close contact with your child's teachers before any problems develop.

Do not allow your child to dress in gang-style clothing, use gang gestures or write gang names, symbols or graffiti on books, clothes, public property or on themselves.

Establish a clear family position on drugs. Kids who know their parents disapprove of drug use are less likely to use them.

Build your child's self-esteem. Focus on your child's good points and praise positive behavior. Help your child feel good about themselves.

Be a role model. Don't abuse alcohol or other drugs, but if you do have a drug problem, please get help.

For Additional Information about Gangs go to:

US Department of Justice COPS PROGRAM  
National Youth Gang Center  
PTA The Parent Teacher Association  
Street Gang Style  
Gangs OR Us